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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000290

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [LH](#)
SUBJECT: PAKSAS'S PARTY WINS VILNIUS MAYORSHIP

REF: A. VILNIUS 104

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 40
[1](#)C. 2004 VILNIUS 382

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Rebecca Dunham for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The new mayor of Vilnius is Juozas Imbrasas, a strong supporter of impeached ex-president Rolandas Paksas and member of the Paksas-led Liberal Democratic Party. His election is a first step toward re-establishing Paksas and his party as significant political players. End Summary.

Municipal Elections in Lithuania

[1](#)2. (U) Lithuania had local elections for each of its 60 municipal districts on February 25 (reftels A and B). Election of mayors throughout Lithuania is indirect; voters elect council members based on party lists, and they, in turn, choose the mayor. Multiparty coalitions are almost invariably needed within municipal councils to select a mayor, and local coalitions often vary considerably from the configuration of political forces at the national level.

Victory in Vilnius: the first step toward redemption?

[1](#)3. (U) After two months of negotiations, the Vilnius City Council elected 67-year old Liberal Democrat Juozas Imbrasas mayor on April 16 with a vote of 28 for, one against, and 22 abstentions. The Liberal Democrats proposed Imbrasas following the public statements of Social Democratic leaders that they could not support LibDem party-leader Paksas as mayor. There will be four Vice Mayors, one from each of the parties in the coalition: Social Democrat Algirdas Paleckis (pa-LETS-kiss), Liberal Movement representative Arunas Staras (SHTA-ras), Polish Electoral Action party member Artur Liudovski (lyoo-DAV-skee), and Liberal Democrat Evaldas Lementauskas (leh-men-TOW-skas).

[1](#)4. (U) The mayoral victory in Vilnius is the first manifestation of the Liberal Democrats' return to power since Paksas left the Presidency in disgrace following his impeachment for violations of his constitutional oath (ref C). The party rode the wave of Paksas's current popularity in the municipal elections, taking 181 council seats nationwide and five mayorships. It continues to do well in polls, and could reassert itself at the national level in Parliamentary elections slated for Fall 2008.

Paksas's rise may mean Paleckis's fall

[1](#)5. (U) The Liberal Democratic Party has come a long way toward re-establishing itself as a legitimate ally, at least for some politicians, after a long period of political isolation. Paksas managed to attract the support of Social

Democrat Paleckis, who caused an imbroglio within his own party when he initially signaled his intention to support Paksas for the mayor's seat. Paleckis, who ultimately gave up his parliamentary seat in order to become a Vice Mayor, so angered his party leadership for negotiating with an outcast that there is talk of cancelling his party membership. The compromise in supporting Imbrasas allowed the Social Democratic Party's central authorities to support the coalition. Nevertheless, there are rumors that Paleckis will switch parties and take the first slot on the Liberal Democratic list in the 2008 Parliamentary elections.

¶6. (U) More surprising than Paleckis's behavior to many political observers was that Liberal Movement chairman Petras Austrevicius decided, apparently on the day of the vote, to support the Liberal Democrats. Many see Austrevicius, who himself ran in the Vilnius council elections and would have given up his MP seat if he could have become mayor, as one of the few principled politicians in the country, and his dalliance with Paksas's party jeopardizes that reputation. The Liberal Movement in general did very poorly nation-wide in the municipal elections. The media has speculated that, in an example of the kind of inter-municipal horse trading that is common in Lithuania, in exchange for the Liberal Movement's support in Vilnius, the Liberal Democrats promised not only a Vilnius vice mayor post, but also to help the Liberal Movement gain the mayorship in Klaipeda.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The Vilnius mayor's seat went to the party that won the most votes in Vilnius. In most places, this would not come as a surprise, but given the serious negotiating that goes on in every municipality, it was not a foregone

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conclusion in Vilnius. In addition, the chattering classes that brought Paksas's downfall in 2004 seemed determined to keep him and his party out of the mayor's office in 2007 in order to prevent his return to legitimacy. They succeeded only partially, by forcing Paksas to defer to a lesser politician from his own party. Time will tell whether Imbrasas will exhibit any independence, or only act on Paksas's behalf.

¶8. (C) The Liberal Democrats ran an innovative grassroots campaign, which may partially account for the party's popularity nationwide. Paksas also excels at playing the victim (which he may be), and this added to his allure to the common man. Paksas himself is still barred from national office, but he is challenging this restriction in the European Court of Human Rights. The head of Lithuania's Constitutional Court recently told the Ambassador that Paksas has no chance to win that case. If he does win, Paksas would certainly become an MP in Fall 2008 to position himself for a presidential run in Summer 2009.

Bio Note

¶9. (C) In the Ambassador's courtesy call on him April 25, Imbrasas appeared to be pragmatic and intelligent. He said he would eschew major changes in the existing plans for Vilnius's year as Europe's culture capital (in 2009), because planning is already well underway. He criticized his predecessor's tendency to support projects in which he was alleged to have a personal interest. Imbrasas expressed his desire to work positively with the USG.

¶10. (U) Juozas Imbrasas was born on January 8, 1941 in the Ukmerge region of Lithuania. A construction engineer, he graduated from Vilnius Construction Professional School in 1961, and the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute (Vilnius chapter) in 1967. He was a Conservative Party member from 1995 until 1999, when he joined the Liberal Union. He joined the

Liberal Democratic Party in 2002. Imbrasas was a strong supporter of Paksas during the latter's impeachment process in 2003 - 2004, even organizing an un-permitted pro-Paksas demonstration in December 2003. He has been a Vilnius City Council member since 1999, and served as mayor from June 1999 to April 2000. He is married to Birute Imbrasiene and has a son (Gediminas) and a daughter (Ramune). He speaks Russian and a little English.

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